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Cyprus: Presidential Elections

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An Intelligence Assessment

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [] Office of
European Analysis. Comments and queries are
welcome and may be addressed to the Chief,
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This paper was coordinated with the Directorate of
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Key Judgments*Information available
as of 10 January 1983
was used in this report.*

Cyprus has remained a divided and troubled island since the coup against Archbishop Makarios in July 1974 and the subsequent Turkish invasion. The presidential election on 13 February in the Greek Cypriot-controlled south—the only internationally recognized government—is the first real contest for the office. Domestic opinion polls and political observers place the incumbent, Spyros Kyprianou, clearly ahead of his two opponents, conservative leader Glafcos Clerides and Socialist Party head Vassos Lyssarides.

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To secure his reelection, President Kyprianou has entered into an unprecedented two-party alliance with the pro-Moscow Communists—a deal encouraged by the Soviets. Moscow considers Kyprianou a known entity whose policies at worst do not threaten its interests and at best are open to manipulation. It hopes that Kyprianou's election will at least keep Cyprus nonaligned and discourage the Western initiatives favored in the past by his most credible opponent, Clerides.

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Although the Cypriot Communists have lent their tacit support to Kyprianou and his centrists in the past, this is the first time any president has acknowledged their support so openly. The Communists are hoping the formal nature of the election pact will provide them with enough ammunition to pressure Kyprianou into acquiescing in some of their demands.

After the election, Kyprianou probably will try to avoid an open confrontation with the Communists. In dealing with their demands for more government posts, we think he will be inclined to continue the stalling tactics that have served him so well in the past. In the foreign policy area, he may be more inclined than previously to appease the Communists with symbolic gestures on issues of little concern to the Cypriot public. On balance, however, we think he is unlikely to weaken his longstanding commitment to nonalignment—a policy that most Cypriots agree has served the island well.

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[redacted] the Communists realize that they will have little tangible leverage over the President once elections are over. They are supporting his reelection as much to defeat his conservative challenger and preclude cooperation between the center and right as to gain new influence. After the elections, the legislative balance will remain the same, with Kyprianou and his party still in a position to play power-broker between the left and right. In short, Kyprianou, who has a long record of cooperating with the Communists informally when he needs them and keeping them at arms length otherwise, will retain ample room for maneuver. [redacted]

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Kyprianou's reelection is unlikely to bring any major changes to the UN-sponsored intercommunal talks that have been under way between the two Cypriot communities intermittently since 1975. The Turkish Cypriot minority, backed by Turkish troops, remains in control of the northern portion of the island. Greek Cypriots, who constitute about 80 percent of the population, control the south. The President is on record as advocating a "long struggle" in the face of the Turkish military presence. Barring any magnanimous gestures from the Turkish side—an unlikely development—the Greek Cypriots, in our judgment, are not likely to offer any key concessions in the near term. Although the Communists support continuation of talks between the two communities, their interests are best served by the prolongation of the status quo—a situation that tends to blunt Western initiatives and exacerbate tensions between NATO Allies, Greece and Turkey. The United States has encouraged the two Cypriot communities to solve their differences and continues to believe the UN-sponsored talks are the best vehicle for reaching a settlement. [redacted]

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As the Cypriot presidential election campaign enters its final week, the focal point remains President Spyros Kyprianou's 10-month-old electoral alliance with the pro-Moscow Cyprus Communist Party, AKEL. Kyprianou's unprecedented formal alliance has sparked heated opposition charges of potential Communist influence and infiltration in government. It also has led to strained relations between Kyprianou and Greek Prime Minister Papandreou,

program—constituted an election platform and set forth the issues on which the two parties agreed. These included the maintenance of a nonaligned Cyprus, the continuation of the intercommunal talks under UN auspices, and a commitment to a mixed economy. The two agreed to disagree on issues not outlined in the program.

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Despite the controversy, Kyprianou remains the front-runner as Greek Cypriots prepare to go to the polls on 13 February. The election is the first real contest for the presidency. Kyprianou won by acclamation in 1978, having assumed the post upon the death of President Makarios the year before. Recent opinion polls show that the electoral balance has not shifted significantly since the 1981 legislative elections when Kyprianou's centrist Democratic Party (DEKO) and AKEL together captured some 52 percent of the vote. Neither of the President's two opponents seems strong enough on his own to defeat Kyprianou in the first round, and they have been unable to bury their differences and agree on a compromise candidate. Moreover, Papandreou has shied away from openly endorsing any of the candidates. If Kyprianou fails to receive the needed majority, he will face a runoff election the following Sunday against the runner-up—most likely the head of the conservative Democratic Rally party, Glafcos Clerides.

DEKO received only 20 percent of the vote in the 1981 legislative elections, and Kyprianou clearly needs the support of another party in order to be reelected. Like his predecessor, Kyprianou has enjoyed the tacit support of the Communists at various times in the past. Despite the more formal nature of his current alliance with AKEL and his party's weaker electoral position, Kyprianou apparently believes he can limit the extent of Communist influence as he has before.

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Over the years, Kyprianou's party has gradually lost ground to AKEL on the left and to the Democratic Rally on the right. At the height of its popularity in 1976, the party commanded 21 of the 35 seats in the House of Representatives. However, the breakup in 1980 of the coalition of centrists, Socialists, and Communists that Makarios had put together to contest the 1976 legislative elections was indicative of growing lack of confidence in the Archbishop's successor and his party. The subsequent defection of a number of DEKO's key figures reduced its legislative strength to eight seats. The party fought the 1981 legislative elections on its own and managed only to hold on to its eight seats.

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An Unlikely Partnership?

Most Greek Cypriots had expected Kyprianou to announce his candidacy for another five-year term as president, but the simultaneous unveiling of a formal electoral pact between DEKO and AKEL was unprecedented. No Cypriot party had ever entered into a formal written agreement with the Communists. In effect, the agreement—known as the joint minimum

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Cypriot House of Representatives, 1983

Party	Leader	Orientation	Number of Seats ^a	1981 Vote ^b (percent)
Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL)	Ezekias Papaioannou	Communist	12	32.9
Democratic Rally (DESY)	Glafcos Clerides	Conservative	11	31.7
Democratic Party (DEKO)	Spyros Kyprianou	Center	9	19.7
United Democratic Union of the Center (EDEK)	Vassos Lyssarides	Socialist	3	8.1

^a Democratic Rally originally won 12 seats in the 1981 legislative elections but lost one to DEKO in a byelection last August following the death of one of its deputies; it stands to lose a second seat pending the outcome of a criminal investigation of one of its members.

^b Total not equal to 100—remaining percentage of vote won by small left and center parties.

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Nonetheless, Kyprianou as President has continued to dominate Cypriot politics, and the party has found a comfortable role for itself over the last several years as a balancing force between left and right. Under Cyprus's presidential system of government, Kyprianou enjoys considerable political clout as both head of state and head of government. Kyprianou's lackluster personality has tended to belie his political shrewdness, and, although he lacks the charisma and the broadly based popularity of his predecessor, he has succeeded in playing off his opponents against each other and holding on to power.

For the most part, Kyprianou has continued the domestic and foreign policies of Makarios—including a nonaligned foreign policy and an economic program that calls for limited state intervention in key industries. At present, DEKO represents the only viable centrist option. Past voting patterns reveal the party is especially strong among refugee groups. Kyprianou's advocacy of a "long struggle" in the face of the Turkish military presence in northern Cyprus appeals to the 182,000 refugees who fled south after the Turkish invasion in 1974—many of whom still want to return to their homes.

AKEL generally follows Soviet policy lines. On foreign policy, this means support for a demilitarized, nonaligned Cyprus and the dismantling of the British bases. It also means support for Soviet initiatives on all major international issues. On domestic questions, however, AKEL tends more often than not to follow an independent course, espousing relatively moderate policies and putting pragmatism ahead of ideology in an effort to broaden its electoral appeal. In a country with deeply rooted religious and cultural traditions, this has been as much a practical necessity as a political strategy. Moreover, AKEL itself has a vested interest in supporting the domestic status quo since it has large commercial holdings. It has profited from the generally strong Cypriot economy, with its low inflation rate, unemployment of under 3 percent, and still expanding export sector.

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AKEL has a strong grass-roots organization, and its 17,000 members are highly disciplined. Various studies note that the party's support comes mainly from urban intellectuals, farmers, and workers. It controls the 60,000-member Pan Cyprian Federation of Labor (PEO), the largest trade union on the island, and the 15,000-strong Union of Cypriot Farmers (EKA). []

At first glance, AKEL's alliance with Kyprianou's centrists seems an unlikely partnership. AKEL's decision to support Kyprianou after attacking him only two years earlier for his inept leadership is a political about-face, and pressing ahead with the decision is not without its political costs in terms of the Communist leadership's credibility with the rank and file. []

[] the Communists have been reluctant to field their own presidential candidate, recognizing that their share of the vote is unlikely to grow much and that they cannot hope to gain the necessary support of other parties. They have preferred instead to try to increase their influence behind the scenes. We believe the Party leaders ultimately were persuaded to back Kyprianou's candidacy because his positions on foreign and domestic matters are less inimical to Communist interests than those of the other candidates.

In 1976 the Communists participated in a loose electoral coalition of the center and left, but they withdrew in 1980 because of differences with Kyprianou over leadership style. AKEL ran in the 1981 legislative elections on its own—increasing its share of seats from nine to 12. With 33 percent of the popular vote, it is today one of the two largest Cypriot parties. []

The Communists, however, have never participated formally in government; no known party member has been appointed to a cabinet-level position, and few have been posted to civil service or security-related jobs. Thus, despite its electoral strength, AKEL has

had very little real impact on most government policies—although it has managed to exert some influence on foreign issues that are of less immediate importance to most Greek Cypriots. AKEL pressure, for example, almost certainly in our view influenced the government's decision to abstain from condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and from speaking out against martial law in Poland. [] 25X1

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The Opposition

The main opposition to Kyprianou's election comes from Democratic Rally leader Clerides. The Democratic Rally ranks with AKEL as one of the two largest parties and is Cyprus's only legitimate conservative party. It attracts primarily the conservative middle and upper class electorate. [] 25X1

Although drawing some 24 percent of the vote in the 1976 legislative elections, the Democratic Rally failed under the winner-take-all electoral system then in place to win any seats in the House of Representatives. The breakdown of the center-left coalition and the introduction of a reinforced proportional electoral system worked to the advantage of the party in the 1981 elections. [] 25X1

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The Candidates

Spyros Kyprianou



Spyros Kyprianou, 50, served as Cyprus's first Foreign Minister (1960-72) and as president of the House of Representatives (1976-77), before becoming President, following the death of President Makarios in 1977. He founded the centrist Democratic Party in 1976.

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The President's health has been one of several factors underlying periodic opposition charges that he is unfit to lead. Nonetheless, Kyprianou is a political survivor, who is adept at playing personalities and parties off against each other.

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Glaucos Clerides



For many years Glaucos Clerides was President Makarios's heir apparent. He was president of the House of Representatives from 1960 to 1976, chief Greek Cypriot negotiator in the intercommunal talks from 1968 to 1976, and Acting President from July to December 1974. Relations between Makarios and Clerides soured after 1974 over the latter's willingness to accept the political support of the extreme right wing and differences over the handling of the intercommunal talks. In 1976 Clerides founded the conservative Democratic Rally party. Clerides is 63 years old.

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Vassos Lyssarides



Camera Press ©

Vassos Lyssarides, 62, founded the small Socialist EDEK party in 1969. An avowed Marxist and self-styled friend of the Third World, Lyssarides has long been a vice president of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, an affiliate of the World Peace Council.

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He is often critical of the superpowers and has taken virulent anti-Western positions, denouncing NATO and calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cyprus. In recent years he has tried to project an image of center-left moderation and has sought more frequent contact with US officials. He is married to an American.

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The Democratic Rally is the only party with an openly pro-West foreign policy. Clerides has stated on various public occasions that only the West can move Turkey toward a settlement of the Cyprus issue. In the past, Clerides has supported the intercommunal talks and has favored Western initiatives aimed at resolving the dispute—such as the British-Canadian-US plan of 1978. During this past year, however, he has denounced the current round of negotiations, although he has admitted to US Embassy officials that his present stand is largely a function of his election campaign. [redacted]

Attracting about 32 percent of the vote in the 1981 legislative elections, Democratic Rally today holds 11 seats in the House. We believe, however, that Clerides may have reached his peak of electoral strength. [redacted]

[redacted] His reputation was tarnished in the eyes of many Greek Cypriots by his apparent willingness in the chaotic aftermath of the events of 1974 to accept the support of extreme rightwing figures sympathetic to the coup against Makarios.¹ The backing of the far right almost certainly strengthened his party in the short term, but to the extent that it scares away more moderate voters, support from this quarter may be Clerides's greatest liability today. [redacted]

Nonetheless, Clerides probably hopes to attract some of the centrist voters who in the past supported Kyprianou but who may now be alarmed by his close cooperation with the Communists. Following the withdrawal from the campaign earlier this year of Georgios Ioannides, an above-party centrist candidate, Clerides probably also hopes to gain the fluid but small moderate vote that traditionally has gone to the minor centrist parties in legislative elections. [redacted]

The third presidential candidate, Socialist party leader Vassos Lyssarides, stands little chance of gaining more than the 8 percent of the popular vote his party

¹ In July 1974, the military junta then ruling Greece supported a coup against President and Archbishop Makarios, which ultimately prompted the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Since then, the Greek Cypriots—about 80 percent of the population—have lived in the south, controlling the only internationally recognized government. The Turkish Cypriot minority, backed by Turkish troops, control the northern 37 percent of the island. [redacted]

won in the most recent legislative elections. [redacted]

[redacted] Lyssarides, who is known to have close personal and ideological ties with Papandreou, apparently is hoping the Prime Minister's popularity will enhance his own election prospects. He has pitched his campaign toward disparate groups, including disgruntled members of AKEL who oppose the party's decision to support Kyprianou—in our view, a small number at best given strong party discipline and Moscow's keen interest in Kyprianou's reelection. Lyssarides is also trying to attract right-wing supporters of Clerides, who are likely to see through that leader's recent about-face on the intercommunal talks. Like Clerides, Lyssarides almost certainly hopes to pick up some of the centrist supporters of Ioannides. [redacted]

Lyssarides's party fits into the radical Socialist mold. The party advocates the nonalignment and demilitarization of Cyprus, the nationalization of key industries, and socialized medicine. While many of their programs are similar to those of AKEL, the Socialists criticize AKEL's blind devotion to Moscow. The Socialists, in public statements, have made clear their belief that stalling tactics by the Turks have rendered the UN-sponsored intercommunal talks fruitless. Unlike AKEL, they have called for an end to the talks unless Ankara shows signs of taking them more seriously. Lyssarides draws support primarily from leftist intellectuals, although he also has followers among salaried workers and small farmers. [redacted]

Personal animosity and fundamentally differing approaches to major issues have kept Kyprianou's main opponents from cooperating to defeat him. According to an Embassy account, Lyssarides remarked around the time the President announced his candidacy that if confronted with a second-round choice between a "criminal" and an "idiot," he would instruct his followers to vote for neither, thus allowing the "idiot"—Kyprianou—to win. [redacted]

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President Kyprianou confers with Prime Minister Papandreou during one of his trips to Athens

Athens: Impotent Bystander

Although the row between Athens and Nicosia over Kyprianou's coalition with the Communists has gradually dissipated since the agreement was announced last spring, Papandreou has made no secret of his displeasure over the accord. Press reports reveal that the Prime Minister was furious with Kyprianou for not consulting him in advance about the agreement and for entering into the alliance with the Communists, who at least in terms of their electoral strength are the senior partners.

Since coming to power, Papandreou has made Cyprus a cornerstone of his foreign policy. His visit to Cyprus last February—the first ever by a Greek prime minister—was a dramatic move designed to demonstrate the importance he attaches to resolving the Cyprus problem. So far his efforts have aimed at increasing the visibility of the Greek Cypriot cause in international forums.

Although Papandreou gives lipservice to the idea of convening an “international conference” under UN auspices, he has focused largely on drumming up support for new initiatives in Western capitals. His attempts to attract eminent Western personalities such as Willy Brandt to act as “catalysts” in the negotiations and his offer to finance a reinforced UNICYP presence to replace the Turkish and Greek troops on the island have made little headway. In our view, however, these initiatives underscore Papandreou's belief that only the West can pressure Turkey into removing its troops from Cyprus. In contrast, the AKEL-DEKO accord emphasizes the development of closer ties with Warsaw Pact countries, the continuation of the intercommunal talks on constitutional and territorial questions, and the convening of an international conference on troop withdrawal and international safeguards.

Although Papandreou has treated Kyprianou cordially during their meetings in Athens, he has tried to avoid giving the President any publicity that could help him in his reelection campaign.

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President Kyprianou, during a trip to Moscow in October 1982, was the last head of state to meet with Leonid Brezhnev before his death



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Each opposition candidate has traveled several times to Athens to meet with Papandreou since last spring, and he, in turn, has sent envoys to Nicosia on at least two occasions. He has stopped short of openly endorsing another candidate, however, and last fall turned down a public proposal from Clerides to convene a conference of all Cypriot party leaders in Athens to discuss a common approach to the Cyprus issue. In our view, Papandreou almost certainly does not want to be seen as pulling the strings in Cyprus—a charge he has frequently leveled against Ankara. More importantly, we believe the Prime Minister is reluctant to put his prestige on the line. Backing a potentially unsuccessful candidate could hurt his image not only in Cyprus but also at home.

The Moscow Connection

Despite some misgivings, Moscow clearly views Kyprianou's reelection as an opportunity for increased influence over Cypriot foreign and domestic policy. The Soviets consider Kyprianou a known entity whose policies at worst do not threaten their interests and at best are open to manipulation.

In our view, Moscow's policy toward Cyprus is predicated solely on its strategic interests in the region—interests the Soviets believe can be served by a perpetuation of the status quo. The protracted—but controlled—tensions on the island have been a contributing factor in keeping Greece and Turkey at loggerheads and thus weakening the southeastern flank of NATO. Strategically, Moscow is opposed to any solution that might enable NATO to use Cyprus as a staging base for out-of-area operations. Through its surrogate AKEL, Moscow has affirmed its commitment to an independent, nonaligned, and demilitarized Cyprus. It generally has supported the UN-sponsored intercommunal talks in order to forestall Western initiatives that might promise a more rapid solution but be less favorable to its interests. At the same time, the Soviets have sought a more active role in the dispute by calling for an international conference to resolve the issue of guaranteeing the island's independence and security.

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Moscow has tried to boost Kyprianou's reelection prospects by orchestrating a series of high-level visits by East European leaders to Cyprus. The President's visit to the Soviet Union—first scheduled in 1979 but

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postponed several times by Moscow—finally took place last October. The completion of the trip removed an issue that had become an embarrassment to both Kyprianou and senior AKEL leaders. [redacted]

gaining formal recognition of their role will ensure that at the very least Kyprianou does not reject their demands out of hand. [redacted]

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Moscow also has tried to boost Kyprianou's campaign—and at the same time increase the President's dependency on the Socialist world—by promoting trade ties between Cyprus and Eastern Bloc countries. To this end, it already has provided a market for Cypriot exports of wine and selected industrial products. [redacted]

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[redacted] Nonetheless, Eastern Europe has a limited capacity to absorb Cypriot goods, and Kyprianou continues to give priority to developing the more lucrative West European markets and closer ties with the EC. [redacted]

Outlook

The election coalition between Kyprianou and the Communists is a calculated gamble for both parties. An electoral defeat for Kyprianou could mean the end of his political career. The President hopes, however, to convince his more moderate supporters that the agreement with the Communists represents no radical shift in the policies of his party and that once back in power he will be able to contain and control potential Communist influence. For AKEL the defeat of Kyprianou would mean a victory for the right and a loss of the indirect influence the party has managed to build up over the years through its growing strength in the legislature. The party is gambling that an essentially conservative Cypriot electorate will not be overly alarmed by the possibility of a more formal Communist role in policymaking. [redacted]

In addition, AKEL almost certainly would like—but probably does not expect—to alter the fundamental outlines of Cypriot foreign policy. For the short term, we think it will be content to score points on foreign policy issues which are of less immediate relevance to the Cypriot public but which have propaganda value for the East. Thus, AKEL probably will try to pressure the President into adopting positions favorable to the Eastern Bloc in forums such as the United Nations. [redacted]

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If Kyprianou wins, the Communists could gain a more direct voice in government. As the only party to support his reelection, AKEL is hoping that Kyprianou will find himself isolated from the other parties and thus more dependent on the Communists than in the past. The Communists' success finally in

For his part, Kyprianou probably would like to avoid an open split with the Communists once elections are over. At the same time, however, he almost certainly will want to distance himself to some extent from his

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Communist partners, and he probably will try to contain Communist influence through the same shrewd stalling tactics that have served him so well in the past. [REDACTED]

Embassy reporting indicate that a number of key figures among Kyprianou's centrists—including Foreign Minister Rolandis and Minister of Defense and Interior Veniamin—were not happy with the President's decision to rely solely upon AKEL's support for reelection. They plan to oppose AKEL's bid for a greater voice in government more actively after the elections. [REDACTED]

Although AKEL supports the continuation of the intercommunal talks, neither the Communists nor Kyprianou, in our view, has any interest in a quick resolution of the issue. AKEL's primary objective almost certainly will be to continue to discourage any Western initiatives on Cyprus and to press for a greater Soviet role. Kyprianou, for his part, probably will allow the intercommunal talks to drag on, even though he has long believed that the negotiations have worked to Turkey's advantage and that the Greek Cypriot side has been forced to make most of the concessions. His large refugee constituency will preclude his agreeing to any settlement plan that does not allow the return of most refugees to the north. [REDACTED]

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Despite encouragement from AKEL—and by extension the Soviets—Kyprianou is also unlikely to concede much on foreign policy issues. He may—as he has in the past—yield on issues that he considers to be symbolic and relatively cost free. We believe, however, Kyprianou will not deviate substantially from Cyprus's long-established foreign policy of nonalignment. Nonalignment has served Greek Cypriot interests well in a region of strategic significance to both superpowers. By balancing relations with the West and East, Greek Cypriots—in their view—have been able to maintain their independence and enhance their international prestige. They have also been able to win Third World support in international forums—an important factor in keeping the Cyprus issue alive over time. [REDACTED]

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We believe Kyprianou's election will have little impact—either negatively or positively—on the prospects for a Cyprus settlement. The United States has encouraged efforts by the two Cypriot communities to solve their differences and continues to believe the UN-sponsored talks are the best vehicle for reaching a settlement. [REDACTED]

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Greek and Turkish Cypriot officials are convinced the United States holds the key to a solution, but past US efforts to play a more direct mediating role generally have fallen victim to each side's expectation that the United States pressure the other. [REDACTED]

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